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ABSTRACT

The board of education's policies concerning the action to be taken in regard to small elementary schools takes into consideration aspects of both educational quality and cost. The following factors will be considered in assessing the future of elementary schools: actual and projected enrollment, long-range need for elementary school facilities in the area, availability of space in and condition of neighboring schools, transportation requirements and routes, socioeconomic and racial balance, operating costs, modernization need, educational program, staffing, role of the school in the community, articulation with secondary schools, and alternative educational and community uses of the facilities. The guidelines for execution of the policy define the purpose, composition, and function of area planning committees. (Author/IRT)

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Small Schools

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Montgomery County Public Schools

• Policy and Guidelines to maintain the quality of education in each school while not permitting substantial inequities in the allocation of resources arising from variations in school size

POLICY

Adopted by the Board of Education June 19, 1974

WHEREAS, Elementary school enrollment in several administrative areas of the county has been declining and this decline is projected to continue for the next five years, and

WHEREAS, The technical literature does not establish by empirical evidence a clear relationship between school size and educational quality in elementary schools, and

WHEREAS, The efforts to compensate for declining size of school enrollment while maintaining staffing and services essential to a quality education may result in operating costs in small schools that may be in some cases several hundred dollars per pupil above the countywide average, and

WHEREAS, The continuation of school differentials when there may be remedies could constitute both a wasteful and inequitable allocation of resources, and

WHEREAS, The Board of Education is seeking to provide the best possible education for each pupil and, at the same time, to operate the public schools as economically as possible, and

WHEREAS, There are many options for reducing the higher costs that occur in some schools including: realignment of boundaries, satelliting one school to another, use of austere personnel practices, other MCPS use of available space and sharing facilities and operating costs with other county agencies, closing larger schools to increase the population of smaller ones, or closing the more expensive schools, and

WHEREAS, The consideration of any school for possible consolidation or operational change is a matter on which the community and the parents in the school must be kept fully informed and must be given an opportunity to be involved in the decision making process; now therefore be it

Resolved, That the Board of Education is committed to maintain the quality of education in each school while not permitting substantial inequities in the allocation of resources arising from variations in school size; and be it further

Resolved, That the Board of Education will utilize independent consultants to construct a cost model to assure fairness and uniformity in measuring the operating cost of both large and small elementary schools in all areas; and be it further

Resolved, That the Board will make no decision and take no action in regard to any particular school community until the community and the school system have had an opportunity to explore the available options and make recommendations; and be it further

Resolved, That the Board of Education and the superintendent, in consultation with the community, will consider the following factors in assessing the future of elementary schools:

- actual and projected enrollment
- long-range need for elementary school facilities in the area
- availability of space in and condition of neighboring schools
- transportation requirements and routes
- socio-economic and racial balance
- operating costs
- modernization needed
- educational program
- staffing
- role of the school in the community
- articulation with secondary schools
- alternative educational and community uses

and be it further

Resolved, That if significant majorities of both the parents

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and faculty want to keep open an elementary school by using austere operating practices that result in per pupil operating costs roughly comparable to those of medium-size schools in the county, the Board of Education may allow this for at least one year if, in the judgment of the Board, the educational effectiveness of the school will not be unduly impaired; and be it further

Resolved, That the weighted enrollment concept be a factor in determining total school enrollment, staff and resource allocations, and the average per pupil operating cost calculations; and be it further

Resolved, That the Board of Education will establish by August 1974, broadly representative Area Planning Committees in Areas 1, 2, and 4, on the basis of recommendations made by the superintendent, Area Advisory Councils, the MCCPTA area vice presidents, and other community leaders; and subsequently in other areas when the superintendent and Area Advisory Councils recommend; and be it further

Resolved, That staff members shall not comprise more than one-third of the membership of any Area Planning Committee; and be it further

Resolved, That by January 1, 1975, the superintendent and Area Planning Committees, separately or together, will publish a preliminary list of any schools or clusters of schools in Areas 1, 2, and 4, which they have under study for possible consolidation or significant modification in operating practices; and that the area assistant superintendent, local principal, and PTA president of each named school be requested to organize a Local Evaluation Committee to review the preliminary work of the superintendent and Area Planning Committees and to contribute to the development of specific recommendations; and be it further

Resolved, That by April 1, 1975, the superintendent and Area Planning Committees, separately or together, will recommend to the Board of Education those schools or clusters of schools in Areas 1, 2, and 4, where an analysis of the above factors shows that a consolidation or significant modification of operating practices may be needed to implement the policies of this resolution; and be it further

Resolved, That by June 1, 1975, the Board of Education will identify from the recommended list of schools those that are to be further studied and will request the Local Evaluation Committees, working in conjunction with Area Planning Committees, to evaluate various options, including those recommended by the superintendent and Area Planning Committees; to obtain community views on these options; and to provide their recommendations to the Board of Education by November 1, 1975; and be it further

Resolved, That the Board of Education will offer assistance to Area Planning Committees and Local Evaluation Committees to arrange for meetings with appropriate county agencies to consider alternate uses of facilities; and be it further

Resolved, That all schools on which the Board of Education is contemplating action under this policy shall be granted a public hearing prior to final Board action; and be it further

Resolved, That decisions to be implemented in the fall of 1976 shall be made by the Board by March 1, 1976; and be it further

Resolved, That for schools whose operation might be significantly affected in the fall of 1977, the superintendent and Area Planning Committees will, by January 1, 1976, publish a preliminary list of those which they have under study for possible consolidation or significant modification in operating practices and which therefore need Local Evaluation Committees; and be it further

Resolved, That the Board of Education will review this policy in March 1976, and make such modifications in procedure and timetable as may be necessary; and be it further

Resolved, That no action will be considered by the Board of Education on the closing of any school in the fall of 1974 or 1975 unless:

- the projected enrollment of the school drops below 150 pupils, or
- the school community requests Board action, or
- racial imbalance requires earlier action.

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY

On June 19, 1974, the Board of Education adopted a policy on small schools. The policy commits the Board to "maintaining the quality of education in each school while not permitting substantial inequities in the allocation of resources arising from variations in school size." To help the Board meet this commitment, the policy establishes area planning committees as major contributors in the decision-making process. These guidelines define the purpose, composition, and functioning of area planning committees.

1. Purpose

Area planning committees are formed to advise the Board of Education and superintendent on matters relating to elementary school consolidations or modifications of operating practices which would reduce inequities in per pupil costs. Examples of possible modifications might include satelliting one school to another, using austere personnel practices, and/or sharing facilities and operating costs with other county agencies.

2. Process

To fulfill its purpose, each area planning committee is charged with the following tasks:

a. Examine the twelve factors identified in the Small Schools Policy as affecting the future of an elementary school, including the implications of weighted enrollment on per pupil operating costs.

b. Develop a list, according to the time schedule in the policy, of schools or clusters of schools which are to be studied by the committee for possible consolidation or modifications in their operating practices.

c. Formulate alternatives for reducing per pupil costs in the schools listed, in consultation with local evaluation com-

mittees, the superintendent and staff, and the Board of Education as appropriate.

d. Recommend to the Board of Education and to the superintendent those schools or clusters of schools that should be consolidated or have their operating practices modified if the Board is to meet the intent of the Small Schools Policy.

3. Membership and Term of Office

a. Members of area planning committees should be broadly representative of the administrative area and be drawn from PTA's, civic groups, area advisory councils, MCCPTA, principals, teachers and other MCPS staff, and other citizens. In forming the committee consideration should be given to including persons from different geographical regions or subdivisions within the area, from minority groups, from different socio-economic levels, and include both men and women. The list of proposed members for the APC will be forwarded to the Board of Education from which 10 to 15 persons will be appointed.

b. The term of office will normally be two years; however, in order to provide for overlapping terms, one-half of the members will be appointed initially to a term ending in March 1976 (18 months) with the possibility of reappointment for an additional two-year term. The other members will serve a term ending in March 1977. No person shall serve more than two consecutive terms.

c. Any APC member who resigns or who fails to participate in any APC activity for a period of three consecutive meetings without adequate reason will be replaced according to procedures outlined in the Small Schools Policy and these guidelines.

d. The area assistant superintendent and area educational facilities planner will be members of the committee.

e. MCPS staff is not to exceed one-third of the membership.

4. Officers, Elections, and Duties

a. The officers of the APC shall consist of a chairperson and vice-chairperson, neither of whom shall be MCPS staff, and a secretary.

b. The first officers of the APC shall be elected in September 1974, to serve until March 1976. Thereafter, elections will be held in March of each year. No APC member shall be eligible to serve more than two terms in the same office.

c. Only those persons duly appointed by the Board of Education to the APC may vote for and be eligible for nomination as APC officers. Nominees for each office must agree to fulfill the duties of that office, if elected. Election to office shall require a majority of votes cast by those APC members present and voting. If there is more than one candidate for an office, the election shall be by secret ballot.

d. Officers shall assume their duties immediately upon election.

e. If any office shall become vacant, the vacancy shall be filled as soon as possible under the procedures in item c of this section.

f. The chairperson shall preside at all APC meetings. If the chairperson is absent, the vice-chairperson shall preside. The secretary shall keep the minutes of all APC meetings and provide them to all committee members; maintain a current list of APC members; keep a record of attendance at meetings; and make public notification of APC meetings.

5. Meetings

a. The APC should hold at least six meetings annually.

b. All official actions of the APC shall require a majority vote of its duly appointed members.

c. All APC meetings shall be open to the public, but only duly appointed members may introduce motions and vote on any question before the committee. The chairperson may decide if or when persons who are not APC members may participate in discussion of agenda items.

6. Logistical Support

Services required to support the committee such as assembling data, contacting resource persons, and secretarial services, shall be provided by the MCPS Department of School Facilities through the area educational facilities planner.

Since its adoption in June 1974, some alterations in its timetable have been approved. The Area 1 Planning Committee was given an extension from April 1 to May 1 to develop their list of schools. No change was made in the June 1, 1975 date when the Board of Education expects to make its next decision.

The area planning committees in Areas 2 and 4 were given an extension to February 1 to submit their preliminary list. Subsequently, the deadline for their second lists was extended from April 1 to June 1. As a result, the Board also extended its decision date from June 1 to July 1, 1975.